

## SLAVERY OF THE MAIN CHARACTER SOLOMON NORTHUP IN THE *12 YEARS A SLAVE* MOVIE

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### ABSTRACT

This research revolve around a movie based on real life experience that show us about the two sides of ideology that clash between each other and the result because of it, learning from history is crucial in order to prevent society to commit the same mistake or experience the same tragedy. Descriptive qualitative approach was used in this research. The research focused on two purposes namely to identify the form of slavery that occur in the movie and the effects of slavery toward the main character *Solomon Northup*'s mental state during his 12 years enslavement. There are five types of slavery that occurred in the movie which are debt bondage, contract slavery, forced labor, human trafficking, and sexual slavery. Solomon showed six kinds of psychological arousal throughout the entire movie which are anger, disappointment, frustration, hate, sad, and happiness and all those emotions were related to his 12 years of enslavement. Furthermore, cognitive label was used to classify those six psychological arousals into three forms. Those three forms of cognitive label are crying, laughing, and screaming. The psychological arousal happiness belonged to both crying and laughing cognitive label. Psychological arousal anger and disappointment belong to cognitive label screaming. Psychological arousal sad and frustration belong to cognitive label crying.

**Key words:** slavery, human rights

### ABSTRAK

*Penelitian ini mengkaji sebuah film yang diangkat dari kisah nyata. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah agar masyarakat bisa mengenali sejarah dan tidak mengulangi kesalahan yang sama. Pendekatan yang digunakan pada penelitian ini adalah deskriptif. Penelitian ini memiliki dua tujuan yakni mengidentifikasi bentuk-bentuk perbudakan yang terjadi dalam film dan efek perbudakan terhadap karakter Solomon Northup selama 12 tahun perbudakan yang dialaminya. Ada lima jenis perbudakan yang ditunjukkan di film, yakni perbudakan piutang, perbudakan kontrak, kerja paksa, perdagangan manusia, dan perbudakan seksual. Solomon menunjukkan enam macam dorongan psikologi, yakni amarah, kekecewaan, frustasi, benci, sedih dan bahagia, seluruh emosi itu berkaitan dengan perbudakannya selama 12 tahun. Selanjutnya, label kognitif digunakan untuk mengklasifikasi keenam dorongan psikologis tersebut menjadi tiga kategori. Ketiga kategori label kognitif tersebut adalah menangis, tertawa, dan berteriak. Dorongan psikologi bahagia masuk di label kognitif menangis dan*

tertawa. Dorongan psikologis amarah dan kekecewaan masuk di label kognitif berteriak. Dorongan psikologi sedih dan frustrasi masuk di label kognitif menangis.

**Kata kunci:** perbudakan, hak asasi manusia

## A. INTRODUCTION

Freedom and human rights are constant struggle that humanity try to achieve. The diversity in human culture creates different point of view and moral value that is unique between one society to another. Diversity is inevitable and sometimes it leads to difficulties to reach mutual understanding. People that unable to accept the concept of diversity could possibly force their moral value upon other people claiming as the better one. This incorrect sense of self-righteousness will ignite more conflict that eventually cripples the progress of freedom and human rights even further.

According to Bales, slavery is the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised (5). Originated from the word *slave* with the definition as a person who is legally owned by someone else, he has to work for that person. Slavery is a sensitive topic but it is an important thing that we need to learn from the past. The importance of learning anything related to slavery is to learn from history and our ancestor mistakes in order to prevent the same mistake happen again in the future.

In order to analyze the slavery topic, the researcher choose a movie entitled *12 Years a Slave* and gathered every relevant data related to the slavery and the researcher own research questions. The movie *12 Years a Slave* was a portrait of Solomon Northup life. Solomon Northup was a born free black man; he lived in New York at the time when America was split into two sides, one side that support slavery and the other side that against it. Solomon Northup was deceived to come into Washington DC where the slavery was legal; he was kidnapped and then treated as a slave. There were some movies also having the same theme but this movie was slightly better than others because not only it was based on the real life experience but also one of the newest slavery movie that won lots of awards. Solomon who was born as a free man and the fact that he was kidnapped and forced to be a slave gave him a really harsh mental breakdown. A person that was born as a slave will give a different reaction since that person had no understanding the pleasure of freedom from the beginning.

With the movie released in 2013, the life experience of Solomon Northup was known worldwide and it was crucial to make sure that this movie follows his experience during slavery faithfully without any changes that altered the story and give different interpretation towards the sensitive topic of slavery. That is why the researcher analyzed this movie thoroughly by using qualitative approach and Two-factor Theory of Emotion alongside Dana S. Hathaway thesis to ensure this research provide to be useful to the readers in identifying and analyzing literary works that contain slavery as the topic.

In order to identify the slavery issue that occurred on Solomon Northup life in the movie *12 Years a Slave*, the researcher brought up two questions as the following: (1) What kinds of slavery shown in *12 Years a Slave*? (2) What are the effects of slavery towards Solomon Northup's mental state on his 12 years enslavement?. From those two research questions the purpose of this study is (1) to identify the kinds of slavery that is shown in the movie *12 Years a Slave* (2) to show the effects toward Solomon Northup mental state on his life experience during his 12 years of enslavement. There are two

benefits from this study to give new knowledge after this analysis (1) Theoritically, this study could be used as a guidance or reference for other researchers who want to analyze Solomon Northup or any other character that has similar circumstances. (2) Practically, this study may helped readers or added their knowledge to understand and identify the effect of enslavement does to a person state of mind.

## **B. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **1. Definition of Literature**

Etymologically, literature comes from Latin word “Litterature” which derived from “Littera” means letter, which contains of alphabetical writing (Klarer 1). From the statement above we can determine that literature is a written text that comes from a very broad source. A literature can be produced by writing text and drawing pictures originated from our imagination or our observation on our surrounding. Literature does not specifically bound to fiction or nonfiction, literature can be created from so many sources with limitless possibility, this what makes literature such an interesting subject to study.

Literature is more than just arranging letter to form a word and sentences, it is about sending the writer message into the readers mind. The variety of human ability to interpret a message is one of the challenges that a writer has to overcome in order to deliver his/her own message into the reader minds. Literature is not only existed in written form, but also the picture, art and visual screen, all that forms have a same similarity which is an art created to deliver a message from the creator. These different forms are because of the different text to share the living and imagination. These are called as literary works.

### **2. Psychoanalysis**

According to Adams (3-11), psychoanalysis is a branch of psychology which was developed by Sigmund Freud in late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Psychoanalysis deals with imaginary, history and creativity and also focuses on the reconstruction of the past and the interpretation of the past to the present. Psychoanalysis can also be described as a theory based on the ideas that mental life functions on both conscious and unconscious levels.

At the earliest time, psychoanalysis is the therapy method used for medical treatment. However, Freud had proved that psychoanalysis can be used for all human imaginative and creative works including literary works. Film or movie is one of the literary works which is the human creative work. In addition, character as the intrinsic element of the movie will be researched. So, in this study, the main character Solomon Northup on the movie 12 Years a Slave is researched by using the theory of psychoanalysis.

The theory of psychoanalysis is too large and not specific enough, so the researcher decides to use *Two-Factor Theory of Emotion* and *Human Trafficking and Slavery: Toward a New Framework for Prevention and Responsibility* thesis by Dana S. Hathaway to answer the research questions on this study.

## **Two-Factor Theory of Emotion**

Two-factor theory of emotion was created by researchers Stanley Schachter and Jerome E. Singer. This theory states that emotion based on two factors: physiological arousal and cognitive label. This theory is used to analyze the emotion that Solomon Northup experience in the film.

Physiological Arousal is the state of being psychologically alert, awake and attentive. Arousal is primarily controlled by the Reticular Activating System (RAS) in the brain. Some emotions such as anger or happiness can change our arousal level. Anger is associated with high level of arousal and in many cases leads to decreased performance. Happiness on the other hand, might lead to increased relaxation and low levels of arousal, also leading to decreases in performance. Arousal often happens through a trigger, which appears through one of our senses. For example arousal can happen through: touch (a punch or kiss), vision (seeing something desirable or distasteful), hearing (a sudden noise or a calming voice), smell (a wonderful smell), taste (delicious or disgusting food).

Emotion can be classified in terms of how arousing or not they are, some of the examples of arousing emotions are joy, happiness, anger, frustration, hate, excitement. Arousal is often talked with metaphor of heat, aroused emotion described as `hot` or `warm`, and the calmer emotions such as: contentment, sadness, confusion, shame, guilt, satisfaction labeled as `cold` or `cool`. Arousal is necessary and it makes us human. At some level being aroused is pleasurable, even negative states such as fear and anger have their benefits.

Cognitive label was an act of assigning psychological attribute into a specific emotion. According to two-factor theory of emotion, if a person fails to assign emotional significance to a physiological attribute, it does not qualify as an emotion at all. The reason is because if the person cannot match the emotion to an event then the emotion is not significant or even necessarily an emotion, it may have been simply a thought. This theory suggests that your emotional reaction is dependent upon how you interpret those physical reactions. One of the examples was when we are crying at funeral, we label it as a sad emotion, but when we are crying at our own graduation, we label that emotion as happiness.

### **3. Slavery Classification**

In order to identify and classify every form of slavery within the movie the researcher chooses Dana S. Hathaway theory to help researcher. Dana aims to reexamine and reinterpret the problem of human trafficking and slavery in a way that highlights the background conditions to the problem. She used United States as a case study in order to provide a targeted analysis of social structural processes that contribute to the problem. She focused on agricultural and domestic slavery in the United States. Her research has greatly given benefit for researcher to obtain better insight of slavery and the ability to identify forms of slavery.

### **Debt Bondage**

The 1956 Convention lists debt bondage as “a practice analogous to slavery”. It defines debt bondage as “The status or condition arising from a pledge by a debtor of his personal services or of those of a person under his control as security for a debt, if the value of those services as reasonably assessed is not applied toward the liquidation

of the debt or the length and nature of those services are not respectively limited and defined (United Nations 1)". This is the most common form of slavery that still remains today. Debt Bondage is a person's pledge of their labor or services as security for the repayment of a debt. At first glance, this might not seem to be problematic as long as both sides have reasonable terms established and abided by. Many migrants came to colonial America under this agreement and living a civil life. Others however were trapped in this debt bondage because one side took advantage mostly through false accounting, exorbitant interest rates, extortion, or unreasonable collateral, repayment is never actually possible and the victim is forever indebted, sometimes even passing the debt to the next generation.

### **Contract Slavery**

Contract slavery is similar with debt bondage. This kind of slavery begins with a mutual agreement between employer and laborer as an exchange of money for labor (or labor for money). A large advance of money is not the reason for employment arrangement. The arrangement usually involves a guarantee of wages for a guaranteed job. This kind of contract work is a common type of employment arrangement and takes place in industries such as agriculture, engineering, writing, education, and manufacturing. Contract slavery is most often found in Brazil and Southeast Asia, but it is also found in places like the United States, Europe, and Canada (Bales 34).

### **Forced Labor**

Forced labor, as a form of slavery affects approximately 12.3 million people worldwide (International Labor Office 1). Slavery that cannot be identified as debt bondage or contract slavery often falls under the category of forced labor. In Africa, approximately 100,000 child soldiers are forced to labor as porters, messengers, cooks, sex slaves, human mine detectors, and armed combatants (Bales 114 – 115). Usually these children are obtained through abduction or sometimes sold by their parents. This is usually referred to as the category "child soldiers" but it is also a type of forced labor (Sisk 22). There are cases in the United States where migrant farm workers are forced to harvest crops at gun point and are locked away during night to prevent escape. In many parts of the world, young girls and women are forced to labor in homes as maids or nannies, or forced into prostitution by being held in brothels or violently controlled by pimps on the streets (Hathaway 23).

### **Forced Prostitution**

Forced Prostitution commonly referred to in the media as "sex trafficking" involves the promotion and exchange of sex service for money. Forced prostitution can occur alongside debt bondage, contract slavery, or forced labor, but is specifically an instance of slavery that involves sex and sexual exploitation for financial gain. Like other instances of slavery, the victim may in fact receive some form of payment, but what is key, like other forms of slavery, is extreme and violent treatment and exploitation. The Council of Europe proposed this as the definition of forced prostitution: "[the] act, for financial gain, of inducing a person by any form of constraint to supply sexual services to another person" (Hirsch 23). Whether in brothel, a strip club, on the street, in the fields or forest, or in any number of situations and environments, victims of forced prostitution are violently controlled and forced to provide sex

“services”. Beyond this psychological trauma is the physical harm that can result: HIV, AIDS, HPV (Human Papilloma Virus) and Cervical Cancer, PID (Pelvic Inflammatory Disease), the dangers of pregnancy and abortion, and numerous other sexually transmitted disease. In addition to life-threatening disease, there is the general trauma of being raped on a daily basis, for month or years.

### Human Trafficking

The process by which some people become enslaved is understood as human trafficking, which can be understood as somewhat analogous to the historical trans-Atlantic slave trade (Bravo 218). The trans-Atlantic slave trade was for the most part highly visible and overt phenomenon: slave raids or trades in African villages, large ships off the port being loaded and unloaded of their human cargo, and slave auctions taking place in the middle of town square. Trafficking today, by contrast, is a complex process and can be rather subtle and difficult to identify.

### Sexual Slavery

Sexual Slavery is a highly organized and profitable business that merchandises women’s bodies to brothels and harems around the world (Barry 39). Sexual slavery has been defined as crime against humanity by the International Criminal Court. In her book entitled *Female Sexual Slavery*, Barry provide a detailed explanation of sexual slavery which is every situations where women or girls cannot change the immediate conditions of their existence; where regardless of how they got into those conditions they cannot get out and where they are subject to sexual violence and exploitation.

## C. RESEARCH METHOD

This research use descriptive qualitative approach, and the method is using psychoanalysis. The researcher chose a slavery identification covered by Dana S. Hathaway in her thesis. By using this Dana S. Hathaway research, it helped the researcher to identify every form of slavery displayed on the entire film. The second theory was using Two-Factor Theory of Emotion by Stanley Schachter and Jerome E. Singer because this object analysis was the main character which related to the emotion and state of mind.

## D. FINDINGS

### 1. The Kinds of Slavery Existed in the Movie

No.	Kinds of Slavery	Existed on 12 Years a Slave	Amount
1	Debt Bondage	✓	1
2	Contract Slavery	✓	1
3	Forced Labor	✓	4
4	Forced Prostitution	×	0
5	Human Trafficking	✓	2
6	Sexual Slavery	✓	1



There were six slavery classifications revealed out such as debt bondage, contract slavery, forced labor, forced prostitution, human trafficking and sexual slavery. However, there were only five sorts of slavery existed on the movie. They were debt bondage, contract slavery, forced labor, human trafficking, sexual slavery.

## **2. The Effects toward Solomon Northup Mental State on His 12 Years Enslavement**

### **a. Psychological Arousal**

Psychological arousal made someone's mental state alert, awake and attentive. It dealt with emotions and affected to his/her performance. Such emotions which belonged to the psychological arousal were joy, happiness, anger, depressed, excitement, fear, shame, hate, love, etc. Being aroused was both pleasant and unpleasant. Arousal also occurred through a trigger such human's senses such as touch, vision, hearing, smell or even taste. The arousal itself affects to someone's mental. In this case, the study was discussed the effects of 12 years enslavement towards Solomon's mental state.

#### **1) Anger**

The first context was that Solomon was crying when he buried one of his nigger friends. In here, he used the both triggers of vision and hearing while seeing this event. He and other niggers was singing in their friend's death, named Uncle Abram. They were full of sorrow. The second context showing Solomon's anger through his sense of hearing was that when Tibeats, Mr. Ford's chief carpenter, sang a nigger song but Solomon could not do anything. The third context was that Solomon showing his anger after witnessing Eliza mourning her lost son the entire day. Eliza's wailing cry upset Solomon because every other slave in that place also lost something, but prefer to stay strong instead of mourning.

#### **2) Disappointment**

To show Solomon's disappointment, he lied to Mr. Epps about his writing mail. He said that he did not know where to send and to whom the mail sent. He was absolutely disappointed because of Mr. Armsby lying. Mr. Armsby told to Mr. Epps that Solomon was going to runaway.

#### **3) Frustration**

Solomon had asked anyone's help to send his mail to Marskville, first to Mr. Ford and second to Mr. Armsby but it failed. It made him frustrated at that time. The last effort was that he asked to Mr. Bass to write letter to inform his family in order to free him.

#### **4) Hate**

Solomon was really hated Epps for his cruel behavior. When he was cottoning, he could not afford the average weight, Mr. Epps gave him lashes. Then Mr. Armsby cured Solomon for this tragedy. It made Solomon really hated Mr. Epps.

#### **5) Sad**

There were some points which made Solomon sad. First was separation with his family. Second was when he is being sold to a new master. Next, was when he could not get any access to mail. The last was separation with his close friend, Patsey.

6) Happiness

Solomon was certainly happy for seeing his family again after being separated from them for twelve years. He apologized to his family for his sudden appearance. Being able to reunited with his family again made him cry and happy seeing his wife and his children again. Another event of happiness on Solomon Northup lives can be witnessed when he enthusiastically engaging on a conversation with Mr. Brown and Mr. Hamilton that offer him a job to play as a violist on a notorious circus group. Solomon Northup were constantly being flattered during this conversation about his well-known reputation as a local violist, this brings joy to him and can be easily recognized by his light tone of voice and smiling expression during the conversation.

**b. Cognitive label**

Cognitive label was an act of assigning psychological arousal into a specific emotion. According to two-factor theory, human's emotional reaction depends on how another interpret the physical reactions. The physical reaction was different or multi-interpretation. For instance, crying could show two assumptions, as crying for joy and crying for sorrow. It was meant that someone's emotion could be labeled in different ways. Here were some cognitive labels found on *12 Years a Slave*.

1) Crying

Solomon's crying could be labeled for joy and sorrow. Solomon was kidnapped by two strangers and put in jail. He could not deserve himself as a free man anymore; he sobbed for this destiny. He cried loudly, screaming, and shouting for help. He was also sold for various misters and worked forcedly. It also made him cry. It was labeled for sorrow. In addition, labeling for joy could be found on the act of gaining free and finally gathering with family.

2) Laughing

It seemed difficult to see Solomon's laugh on this movie. Labeling laugh could be in happy or threatening conditions. Laughing in happy condition could be seen while Solomon thought that he got more payment if he would have played three days performing in a circus. Another way to label the laughing in threatening condition when he could bring the woods just by crossing the river so it took less time. He could laugh at the time even though he was on horrible condition.

3) Screaming

As explained in labeling cry, the events described the screaming was two ways. In the horrible condition, Solomon screamed for asking people's help when he was in jailed. Besides, he also screamed for showing his happiness to see Mr. Parker who took him and finally freed him then he could gather with his family.

**E. CONCLUSION**

From the throughout analysis regarding the subject, two conclusions were drawn (1) There were five types of slavery shown in *12 Years a Slave* movie as, debt bondage, contract slavery, forced labor, human trafficking, and sexual slavery. (2) The effects toward Solomon Northup mental state on his 12 years a slave were based on two type's namely psychological arousal and cognitive label. The effects belonged to psychological arousal was anger, disappointed, frustration, hate, sad, and happiness.



However, based on cognitive label, the effects toward Solomon mental state was crying, laughing and screaming

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